

Opening Statement
at the Open Hearing
on
the Role of Intelligence in Protecting the Border

The Honorable Rick Renzi
Chairman House Permanent Select Committee On Intelligence

17 August 2006

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for joining us today for what is a very rare opportunity indeed for the Intelligence Committee – an open field hearing on the Role of the U.S. Intelligence Community in protecting the nation's borders.

I especially want to welcome the students and faculty of Buena High School. And, I particularly want to thank you for allowing us to use your school's auditorium for this event. Go Fighting Colts!

Today's hearing is one of a number of congressional hearings being conducted across the country to look at the issues of immigration, border security and the impact of illegal trafficking on our nation. Our focus as the oversight committee for intelligence matters, is on the role intelligence plays in securing the southwest border.

Far too often the southern border of the United States is characterized only as a porous crossing point for illegal aliens looking for job opportunities in the United States—not as a vulnerability to our national security. The reality is, however, that human traffickers, drug smugglers, narco-terrorists, violent criminal gangs, and, yes, we even have to consider the possibility that international terrorist organizations are leveraging the same routes, crossings and in some cases “blending in” with “economic” aliens. In fact, the Intelligence Community recently prepared a detailed assessment of the national security implications of the international drug trade that makes such a connection.

Clearly, the area has become fertile ground for transporting humans, drugs, weapons and cash across the border. If not well monitored and managed, increasingly the sophisticated smuggling networks may look to expand their activities. Their success in exploiting our security gaps could potentially draw the attention of terrorist groups, like al Qa’eda, looking for ways to enter the country.

The role of intelligence is essential to protecting the border from the many foreign threats. Timely and accurate intelligence is critical to providing a Special Agent the information about the

threat long before a person or shipment can cross into the U.S. High quality intelligence can provide the proper authorities with the necessary knowledge to properly defend the border and our public. And, actionable intelligence can save the lives of our law enforcement officials. Bottomline, we must make the best possible use of intelligence capabilities to shore up our border protection.

The events of September 11, 2001, emphasized the urgency to secure our borders and prevent the movement of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction into the Homeland. Just last week, the world was once again reminded of the terrorists' aspirations and willingness to carry out another attack against the United States and its allies. Thankfully, timely intelligence, heightened security at our airports and a high degree of coordination and cooperation with our foreign partners disrupted the airliner bombing plot before it could be carried out. But, as we have seen, terrorist networks are patient and they learn. We can expect that tighter security at our airports will result in them looking to gain entry into the U.S. through different means, including at our open land borders. That will require us to be more vigilant in the monitoring and surveillance of these areas.

In the years ahead, we cannot expect to defeat highly skilled smuggling networks by merely holding the “line.” Our national security relies on our ability to maintain depth and defense. By dedicating the necessary personnel and technological resources – some clearly along the border - we can improve our ability to provide Agents in the field with timely and accurate information on a potential enemy’s movement before they reach the border. Our mission here today is to understand the border defense problems, so that we can gauge the intelligence needs and capabilities that can be brought to bear against that problem set.

The U.S. Intelligence Community has highly dedicated people and some incredibly powerful tools at its disposal. A great deal of this capability could be carefully and legally used for this mission. But it will require a great deal of coordination with our law enforcement partners. We learned a terrible lesson on 9/11 that terrorists were able to operate “under the radar” because there was too little communication between the intelligence and law enforcement communities. The very agencies we count on to track and apprehend terrorists simply did not, and in some cases, were not even allowed to, talk. Since that time, the Congress has taken legislative action to tear down stovepipes and encourage

information sharing, including passage of the Intelligence Reform Legislation and renewal of the Patriot Act. Today, there are a number of multi-agency centers that bring together representatives from across the intelligence and law enforcement communities. This allows intelligence and law enforcement personnel to work collaboratively, ensuring threat information is shared in a timely manner. Some of our Committee Members have had the opportunity to visit one of these centers here in Arizona - The Arizona Counter Terrorism Information Center is a prime example of how federal, state, local and tribal officials can and are working together to respond to threats coming across the border.

The ability to secure the border is also reliant on our ability to work with our foreign partners. As I mentioned, the recent plot to attack U.S. airliners was successfully disrupted because British and U.S. officials coordinated intelligence activities throughout the operation. We were able to identify and apprehend the terrorists before they reached our borders. The need for such timely and accurate intelligence is even more critical along the southern border where a terrorist can walk into the U.S. That is why it is important that we maintain a strong and trusting relationship with our Mexican partners. I hope our first panel will shed some light

on their relationship with the Mexican government and how they work jointly with the Mexicans to secure the border.

Also, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about steps taken to secure the borders against the threats that human smuggling networks and drug cartels present to our security, especially in Arizona. With us today are representatives from the agencies that have primary responsibility for protecting the southwest border, including the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Customs and Border Protection and the Drug Enforcement Administration. We are clearly interested in how the agencies use and collect intelligence to deter and prevent illegal trafficking across the border. We need to know what more needs to be done, as we are committed to working ensure you have the necessary resources to protect the border.

Before, I turn to our Ranking Democratic Member, I want to thank our first panel of witnesses: Jim Woosley, Director of ICEs Southwest Field Unit; Victor Manjarrez, Deputy Chief Patrol Agent with CBP; and John Comer, DEA's Assistant Special Agent in Charge (of what???) for being with us today and for sharing your views on these important issues.

Additionally for our second panel, we have representatives from state and local agencies to discuss how they have seen the smuggling networks adapt to anti-trafficking campaigns, and what they believe is needed to prevent these networks from successfully exploiting the open border. We welcome Martin Vaughan, Director of Air Operations at CBP, Sheriff Larry Dever, and Robert Halladay, Commander of the Arizona Counter Terrorism Information Center for sharing their views.

With that, I turn to our acting Ranking Member, Mr. Holt.